

Berlin Marathon Race Report 25 September 2011

Race details:

Date: 25 September 2011

Race time: 2 hours 55 mins 16 seconds

Position: 693rd out of 40,000. 192nd in Mens 40+ years category.

I'd been really looking forward to the Berlin marathon for a long time, particularly as I'd had to pull out of the 2010 event. It's one of the big 5 world marathons and by all accounts a pretty special event. There was added spice this year with the participation of some all time greats – Haile Gebrselassie, Patrick Makau and Paula Radcliffe – plus another 40,000 runners!

Berlin is a traditionally fast marathon, and I was out to achieve a PB. Having got below 3 hours at Edinburgh in May (2hr 56) I was aiming to beat that, with 2hr 55 my target.



I flew out on the Friday with my friend Darren, who did the race last year and who was coming along to support me and enjoy the beer afterwards (and before for him!). The atmosphere in the City was fantastic throughout the weekend. On the Saturday I watched Darren do the Breakfast run, which finished in the Olympic Stadium, before we headed to registration at the Expo – this was held in a huge aircraft hanger and was a brilliant event with so many stalls selling

kit and promoting marathons from around the world. We then went to watch the skating marathon – a superb event in itself. It was a really good day in one of my favourite cities, and by Saturday night I was buzzing with excitement about the big event the next day.

I carefully laid out all my kit on Saturday night, before attempting to get to sleep early. That didn't happen. A noisy hotel and my nervous state meant that I was awake for much of the night.....not ideal preparation for the race.

Nevertheless, I did eventually get some sleep and awoke feeling very excited about the morning ahead. After my usual pre-race breakfast (which I had carefully transported from the UK), we walked to the starting area which was less than a mile from the hotel. It was a beautiful cool clear morning, but looked set to be sunny and potentially hot.

The heat was my biggest worry about the race, as I have never run well in the sun. It had been about 70 Fahrenheit on the Saturday and similar conditions looked likely for race day. I bought a cap at the Expo to give me some protection from the sun, and reminded myself that I must take water at every opportunity.

With about 75 minutes to the start of the race, I was in the starting area – which is huge and goes on for miles. I did my usual routine – stretches, yoga, some jogging and short sprints – and then headed to my start pen.

It was a very long walk to my start position in the Tiergarten. When I got there, I found myself in the second block after the elite athletes – I was only around 25 metres from the start line, which was a bonus as I wouldn't have to worry about working my way through the crowds. As we stood waiting to go, they played the music from Chariots of Fire – I closed my eyes and took it all in, feeling a mixture of nerves and great excitement. The elite runners were introduced and then we were off!



Starting so close to the front, meant I was carried along at a good early pace as we went along the famous Strasse des 17 Juni, and round the impressive Siegesaule monument. With the likelihood of a hot day, I was careful to hold myself back a little. I felt pretty good early on, and my 19 mins 51 seconds for the first 5km was just about where I wanted to be. I carried on at this pace, past the Reichstag at 7km, and hit 10km in 40 mins 15 seconds in good shape.

My main memory of the next 10km section was just how fantastic the support was. The crowds got bigger and louder, which was a real inspiration, and I loved running past so many different and diverse live bands. As usual, my race plan was to run a faster first half and then to dig in for the second half. I was managing to stick to my target of around 6 mins 25 seconds per mile for the first half marathon, knowing that would slow as the race went on. The second 10km was completed in 40 mins 49 seconds.

I was coping well with the conditions. It was getting warmer, but wasn't uncomfortably hot. I focused on staying in shade wherever possible, and I took in water at every one of the frequent water stops whilst munching on my Cliff shot blocks for a carbohydrate and electrolyte boost every 4 miles or so. My only concern was that I was feeling tightness in my left leg from quite early on, which I couldn't

shake off. Still I pushed on, passing the half marathon point (where the crowds were particularly noisy) in 1 hour 25 mins 25 seconds. This was a slower first half than in Edinburgh (when I'd run under 1hr 25) but I hoped that I was pacing myself more effectively.

I was really enjoying the event. My focus on running and keeping to target times meant that I didn't take in as many of the historic sights as I should have. But I was finding the support amazing, particularly enjoying the live bands, and it was great to be part of such a spectacular event.

The second half was all about grinding out the miles and sticking to my target times for each mile. That was easier said than done. I knew I was slowing down and the tightness in my leg was increasingly turning into a dull ache which was not helping. There is a video of me at various points in the second half of the race (click on this link). Someone pointed out that I am checking my watch a lot on the video, which was a sign that I was finding it tough and desperately trying to keep the pace up. I look very ungainly in the video and it looks like I am really having to dig in hard (which I was!).



I had to average 6 mins 50 seconds per mile for the second half. I pushed on quite hard through the next few miles, aiming to get the

point where I could allow myself to run 7 minute miles and still achieve my target time.

I was boosted by seeing Darren at around 17 miles. After that the next stretch was tough. My aching leg was making it hard, and it was difficult not to be daunted by how many miles lay ahead. I just tried to focus on 1 mile at a time and continued to be lifted by the crowds. I was definitely slowing, and was just getting my head down and pushing hard to try and keep to 7 minute miles or faster. My 3rd 10km time was 41 mins 39 seconds and the next 5km was 21 mins 36 seconds.

As I got to around 22 miles, I started to turn a corner. With only 4 miles to go, I knew that the end was in sight. I also knew that the crowds would get bigger and louder as I approached the end, and that I would be able to enjoy more great sights as we returned to the central part of the city.

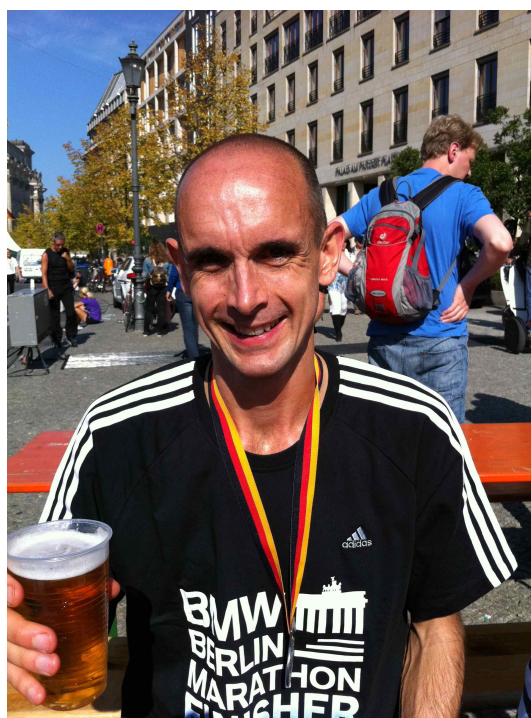
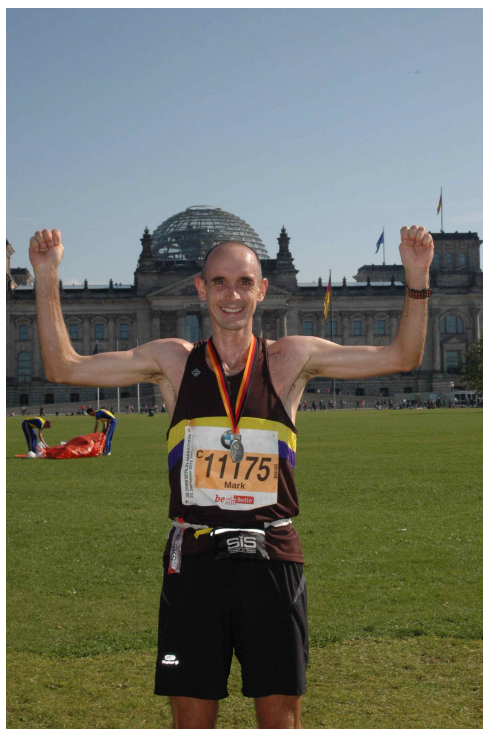
I dug in for miles 23 and 24, and then I started to find new strength as I passed Potsdamer Platz with just over 2 miles to go. I was able to pick up the pace a little, knowing the end was in sight. I was pleased to find myself overtaking quite a few runners and was enjoying the big final push. I knew my target of 2 hours 55 mins was within reach but that I had to keep going and that it would still be quite tight to achieve my PB.

Eventually I turned one more corner and saw the glorious sight of the Brandenburg Gate, about 1km ahead. I pushed on hard. It was a great feeling to run through the Brandenburg Gate, and back onto the Strasse des 17 Juni. I loved the final 400m charge to the line, with big crowds roaring us home, in the glorious sunshine. Such a grand finale to the marathon!

I crossed the line in 2 hours 55 mins and 16 seconds. A new PB! I finished 693rd out of the 40,000 or so runners and 192nd in the over 40 category. Patrick Makau had smashed the world record about 51 minutes earlier! I couldn't quite match, but it was good to be part of such a great event.



I was pleased with how the race had gone. My splits were more balanced than previous marathons which I'd done – 1:25:25 for the first half and 1:29:52 for the second. That second half had been tough. My ever tightening and aching leg had been a hindrance, and so it was good to have been able to push through that and achieve my goal.



Despite the pain, I thoroughly enjoyed a really fantastic event. Berlin is an amazing city, steeped in so much history and looking particularly grand on a glorious sunny day. Above all else the crowds were fantastic. I'm told that Berlin is second only to London for atmosphere and support.....if so then I can't wait to do London!

I picked up my treasured race medal....everyone seemed so proud of their medal and it was great to see so many people still wearing medals the next day in the airport. After a few photos in front of the Reichstag, and I met up with Darren and enjoyed some beers in the post race area by the Brandenburg Gate. A great way to spend a Sunday afternoon, soaking up the sun and the party atmosphere, and feeling very happy and satisfied after a brilliant morning of running!